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AUTHOR Trayer, Marie
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ABSTRACT

A curriculum designed for secondary school fourth-year language students focuses on the human life cycle in the Hispanic cultural context. Four lessons cover the following topics: (1) Hispanic values; (2) the roles of women and men in Hispanic society; (3) customs related to dating, love, marriage, and divorce; and (4) treatment of death. Each lesson contains oral proficiency activities centering on class discussions of readings and observations about life in the United States. Skeletal outlines of the readings are provided in advance. Role-playing in a realistic situation, especially involving culture shock, is a key classroom activity; native speakers are brought in whenever possible. Compositions are assigned after each lesson to emphasize writing proficiency. In the compositions students both summarize and compare Hispanic and American cultural characteristics and then attempt to create a new or better society. An advantage of the life cycle themes is that they help students to clarify their own values and understand the values of another culture. (MSE)

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11 Advanced Language Classes: Revitalizing the Curriculum

Marie Trayer
Millard South High School, Omaha, Nebraska

Deciding what to teach in advanced secondary language classes always seems to be a problem. Students are tired of grammar-drill practice so prevalent during the first three years. In the advanced class, one finds varying degrees of oral proficiency, but at least one can now begin to use the term *fluency* with a clear conscience. In addition, much of what has been done in previous years is structured at lower levels of thinking (e.g., recall, comprehension). This last year provides many opportunities to stimulate synthesis (creativity) and evaluation in the target language (Bloom, 1).

Selecting the fourth-year curriculum is difficult: second language authorities give little guidance, and textbook choice is limited. The few texts available are disorganized; they cover many topics without a common underlying theme.

Student characteristics must be considered, especially at the advanced levels of language study. Though some students may go on to college to study a language course or two, most are in the fourth-year class in order to fulfill the college language requirement in advance. Seniors, therefore, exhibit little love of the subject matter and also show a certain lack of motivation, both probably brought on by three years of the same subject often taught by the same teacher. As a result, the teacher must work harder to stimulate interest and motivation.

Description of Curriculum

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The curriculum described below was created to meet the needs of these fourth-year students. The human life cycle gives continuity to the series of lessons and serves as a cultural foundation. The first lesson identifies

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Hispanic values. The second emphasizes the roles of men and women in Hispanic society. The third studies Hispanic customs dealing with dating, love, marriage, divorce. The fourth covers Hispanic treatment of death. Since these are common cultural themes, any language taught in secondary schools could follow a similar format.

Each lesson contains activities to increase oral proficiency. These activities center around class discussions of the readings and observations about life in the United States. Skeletal outlines are furnished before the articles are read, giving the students a basis for understanding what they read. Afterwards the outlines are used as a foundation for class discussion in Spanish.

The key activity that generates conversation among students is role-playing a realistic situation. Situations involving culture shock can be created by the teacher or students working individually or in groups. These situations usually take place in the target culture. Students explain why the culture shock has occurred, how they feel, and how the differences can be bridged. The roles can be reversed, students taking on the role of Hispanic visitors in the United States trying to cope with strange ways.

Whenever possible, native speakers are brought into the classroom and interviewed by the students to corroborate or refute information presented on the target culture. These interviews allow the students to see that they are not studying abstract entities, but real people who have feelings and beliefs just as they do. After the interviews, students are asked to react to what they heard, either orally or in writing.

Compositions are assigned after each lesson to emphasize written proficiency. In these compositions students summarize both the American and Hispanic cultural characteristics and then create a new and/or better society than already exists. This can be written as one extended composition or assigned in parts as each segment of the lesson is studied.

The example of creating a new society utilizes the two highest levels of thinking: synthesis and evaluation. *Synthesis* takes the information that is learned and asks that something new be created from it. *Evaluation* asks that intelligent judgments be made based on the information gathered. Students sometimes find these levels of thinking difficult, but that is exactly why they should be included in the curriculum. Much of what is presented in texts never asks for a level higher than application. When ample opportunities are provided, however, students can begin to exercise their thinking skills, and each time the task becomes a little easier.

Lesson 1: Values

Before any cultural generalizations are presented to the class, the meanings of the words *culture* and *stereotype* are discussed. An article on culture from *The Nacirema* (8), a satiric anthropological description of American culture, is read and discussed. The concept of stereotyping is also analyzed.

Before studying Hispanic values, students identify their own values. An exercise used to identify values is entitled, "Twenty Things You Love to Do" (Simon, et al., 7). The students are asked to list 20 things they love to do and then code their choices (for example, do they cost more than $5, or are they done alone or with people?). This exercise gives students the opportunity to analyze the values that determine their daily use of leisure time.

Students are also asked to list ten things that anger them, and then search for the underlying value that is violated causing their anger (Moskowitz, 6). After completing the exercises, students have a clearer picture of what is important to them.

Students are now ready to analyze Hispanic values. They read three articles, "Individualismo Hispánico" and "Otras Características" (Diaz, 3) and "La Familia en el Mundo Hispánico" (Copeland et al., 2). Students next write a composition, first describing themselves according to these values exercises, then describing Hispanic values according to the articles read, and finally evaluating both sets of values by choosing what they like best from both cultures to create a perfect society.

In order to increase oral proficiency, students role-play a realistic situation. They imagine themselves, for example, going to a Mexican friend's home for a party. They see people of all ages dancing and singing until three o'clock in the morning. Questions arise as the visitors observe these differences. The Mexican friend has to answer them. Students can simultaneously role-play the situation in small groups, or can perform in pairs in front of the class.

Lesson 2: The Sex Roles

To begin the lesson on the role of men and women in society, students divide into small groups and draw their concept of the typical male and female. As an alternative they can cut pictures out of magazines. Stories

are created in class to describe the typical day of these caricatures and their relationship to each other. The teacher must help students distinguish between any stereotypes resulting from this activity and the reality of their own experiences.

After the stereotypical sex roles in the United States have been identified, students are ready to study Hispanic roles. Students read articles and Spanish literary works on the concepts of *machismo* and *marianismo* (women like the Virgin Mary) (Diaz, 3). Hispanic magazines and newspapers are used to find pictures in ads of the typical male and female. Students must write two original ads for the same product: one that would appeal to the different sexes in the Hispanic culture; another to males/females in the United States. Comparisons are made between the two cultures. There is special emphasis on the decreasing evidence of true machismo in the Hispanic countries. Though the "macho" male exists in almost every culture, the role is not as prominent as it once was.

An enlightening experience for students is to roleplay reversed sex roles. It is a "typical" afternoon at home, the exhausted father arriving home from work, the mother tired from working with the children all day. Conflict arises as each expects comfort from the other. The students must resolve this conflict as they roleplay so that each person comes out a winner.

Lesson 3: Dating, Love, Marriage, Divorce

As preceding lessons illustrate, students must identify their own customs first. How do they describe dating in the United States? The students write culture capsules using their own ideas about dating. These capsules are compared and analyzed with others in the class. Finally, a single capsule that best describes dating in the United States is synthesized from the various ideas of individual class members.

Because dating is so important in students' lives, many exercises in resolving problems can be used. Each student writes on a card a dating problem that he or she has heard of or has had. These problems can then be answered by individuals or by groups in the format of advice column letters. Problems and solutions are posted on the bulletin board so that everyone can read them.

To learn about Hispanic dating customs, culture capsules are used

(Miller, 5). Though the literature may not be current, the students understand these traditional customs. An excellent way to compare cultural differences in dating is to have students explain American dating customs to a newly arrived exchange student. Because the exchange student does not speak English very well yet, students must use drawings to assist in conveying information. The scene then changes to Mexico, where someone must explain Mexican dating customs to the American students.

Love is the next step in the life cycle. Instead of an emphasis on differences, students focus on the concept of love. In groups, students draw their perceptions of love on large pieces of paper. Groups must agree on a drawing that best describes love and must explain to the class in Spanish why they chose their particular representation. *Paso a Paso* (Hampares et al., 4) has a very effective unit on love that is read at this time.

Popular Spanish love songs are used to analyze love. Students receive the lyrics of a song with some words omitted. As the record plays, the students must fill in the words. Then the song is translated and analyzed for love themes. Besides love songs, there are many other sources in both the American and Hispanic cultures where love themes are prevalent. Literary works, television shows, advice columns, ads, and articles from newspapers and magazines—all can provide material for this unit. Orally or in writing, students create their own songs, poems, stories, ads, soap operas, newspaper or magazine articles with love as a theme.

The love theme lends itself to many kinds of realistic situations. One student can pretend that his or her sweetheart has just decided that they are getting too serious and that they need to date other people, although they will still continue seeing each other. The devastated student calls a close friend for advice. After listening, the student confronts the sweetheart with a new plan. Students empathize with this situation and can gain some insight into love problems in their own lives.

Hispanic and American engagement and wedding customs differ, and these differences are interesting to the students. Engagement and marriage announcements in Hispanic newspapers illustrate some of these differences. If possible, the teacher can invite a Hispanic couple to show wedding pictures and describe their wedding ceremony, or they can contrast their experience with what they have observed in the United States. Using this information, students plan their own imaginary engagements and wedding ceremonies, the only stipulation being that they are

now in Mexico. They prepare announcements, plan the dinners, and perform mock services in front of the class.

Roleplaying and problem-solving are also useful techniques in dealing with the concept of divorce. The students divide into groups: one playing the judge, the others the troubled family. The opposing sides present their points of view. The judge takes notes, asks questions, and then determines the solution and reconciliation of the family.

Lesson 4: Death

Students read an excellent unit on death covering many aspects of the concept (Hampares et al., 4). Students who want to do so can share with the class or with the teacher their experiences concerning the loss of loved ones. After this activity, the teacher presents the stages of death and grieving. If desired, students can research and describe procedures and costs in making funeral arrangements.

Students read Somerville's thorough presentation on Spanish customs relating to death (9). The packet, which is in individualized study format, covers the funeral announcement, the funeral itself, and burial customs. Next, students design their own funerals and write their own epitaphs and obituaries, incorporating customs from both cultures. If they desire, they can prepare eulogies honoring their own lives or lives of their family and friends. Students can be funny, creative, or serious in their speeches.

Conclusion

The preceding description is only a sampling of possible activities. Over the years of development, many aspects of the curriculum have been added and deleted, with many variations incorporated. Still, the central themes of the life cycle have remained intact. It is hoped that reading this description can provide a trigger for many fresh ideas to be added to the reader's advanced language classroom. Not every activity is successful for every teacher, but each may provide an inspiration for increasing student creativity and oral and written self-expression. The life cycle themes help clarify students' own values and also promote a better understanding of the values of another culture.

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